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26 January 1954

FRENCH VULNERABILITY TO FIVE-POWER CONFERENCE
PROPOSALS AT BERLIN

- I. During past few months, steadily mounting pressure in France for relief from the Indochina burden.
 - a. October debate on Indochina policy showed that without proof that an early military victory was possible, the government could not delay much longer an early reduction of the French effort in Indochina.
 - b. On 8 December, following the Ho Chi Minh "peace offer," the American embassy in Paris foresaw the course of events possibly setting off "a chain reaction which could move inexorably toward a conclusion of hostilities in Indochina, and at a pace over which no one man or group of men in France might be able to exert effective control."
 - c. On 6 January Vice-Premier Reynaud reiterated to the American embassy that France must seek a suitable international conference to end the war.
- II. On 21 January, immediately after reaching Saigon from Paris, Secretary for the Associated States Jacquet told Ambassador Heath:
 - a. "The Alsop article which was denounced in Paris and Washington was not really so short of the truth."
(Jacquet was reportedly "licensed" when Alsop wrote on 4 January that France would recall its forces from

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Indochina unless allied reinforcements were provided within the next three to six months.)

b. Unless General Navarre produces some victories in the next few months, French parliamentary opposition to continuing the French effort in Indochina would force any government to open negotiations with Ho Chi Minh.

1. Little hope for success in such talks, but it might be possible to get Communist China to cease aiding the Viet-Minh.

c. No possibility of a decisive defeat of the Viet-Minh unless there were eventually American participation in the form of a "foreign legion" with American flyers, mechanics, and technical warfare specialists.

III. Present French conditions for five-power talks:

a. A Foreign Ministry spokesman told the American embassy on 20 January that the West should be prepared to agree to a five-power conference on Asian subjects alone, subject to the following considerations:

1. No discussion of Asian questions at Berlin
2. Substantial progress at a prior Korean conference
3. Priority for the Indochina question
4. No advance concession to Communist China

b. Bidault said at the second meeting of the West's foreign ministers at Berlin, 24 January that:

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1. It was essential to hold out the hope that, should the Chinese Communists proceed with the Korean settlement and give signs of good faith, some kind of Indochina political settlement was possible.
2. France was now "procrastinating" on any Indochina negotiations, but "talks would have to be tackled sometime."

IV. Nevertheless, according to French press reports, the position arrived at in the 20 January meeting of the Council of Ministers (the first under President Coty) was:

- a. General agreement that EDC cannot be bartered for a cessation of the Indochina war; but at same time
- b. Extensive sympathy for engaging in a suitable five-power conference.

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